MARVEL

1

BRING ON THE BAD GUYS

Red Skull

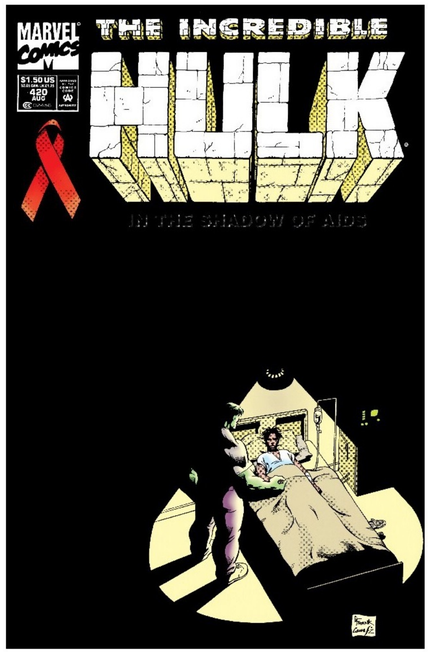
PHILLIPS
BIANCHI
FAJARDO JR.

GUGGENHEIM
STA. MARIA
SÁNCHEZ-ALMARA

RATED T+

"The only meaningful power is the power we have to help each other. And no power is greater than love, Rick. It's very cornball. It's also true."

— **Peter David** in *Incredible Hulk #467*



"Peter's Hulk was a green beacon at the point when I was breaking into comics. It seemed to be the one book at Marvel without an 'X' on it that really got fans excited. When I came aboard, I couldn't believe how welcoming and generous Peter was to a young artist with no real track record, and the humanity in his characters became a template for the kind of books I would always want to make.

"Even today, thirty years later, the majority of fans I meet open with, 'I loved that Peter David run on Hulk.' Special books. Special writer."

— Gary Frank

"Peter was always thinking around corners. Whenever he got a new assignment, his approach would be, 'Okay, what does everyone expect from this series? Great, let's do something else.' And he'd show you a different angle, a different approach, that would suddenly illuminate the characters in a whole new way. He wasn't an 'Everything you know is wrong' guy, but he was definitely an 'Okay, what else?' guy. And it worked—for him, for the books, for his legion of readers. He'd give you something no one else could."

— Kurt Busiek

PETER DAVID

1956-2025

Marvel is saddened by the passing of Peter David, an incredible writer whose talents affected every part of the comics world and beyond.

David's twelve-year run on *Incredible Hulk* was remarkable not only for its length, but also for the depth of ideas, innovations and clever writing. His influence on the character has extended through the years and from page to screen.

He created Spider-Man 2099, one of the first multiversal Spider-Men, and wrote three smart, charming and character-focused *X-Factor* runs. He brought his talents to the rest of the comics industry, including DC's *Young Justice*, *Aquaman* and *Supergirl*. He has written many shelves' full of novels, from his own *Sir Apropos of Nothing* to many ground-breaking Star Trek novels. His column for the *Comics Buyer's Guide*, "But I Digress," gave insights into the comic book industry for more than a decade.

On television, he was the co-creator of *Space Cases* and wrote episodes of *Babylon 5*. He also wrote the films *Oblivion* (1994) and two entries in the *Trancers* series. He has won numerous awards, including an Eisner, an Inkpot, a *Wizard* Fan Award and a GLAAD Media Award.

He is survived by his wife Kathleen and his children Shana, Gwen, Ariel and Caroline.

PHOTO BY KATHLEEN O'SHEA DAVID

ON THE BAD GUYS

Red Skull

The SOUL FORGE is an ancient artifact that can give whoever gains access to it control over all souls on Earth. The forge can only be utilized after a sacred incantation is delivered along with the souls of descendants from an ancient cult known as the LORDS OF DARKNESS.

Whoever gains access to the Soul Forge puts the fate of the souls of the entire planet in peril. As MEPHISTO and his reluctant disciple SISTER SORROW aim to power the forge, villains from throughout history are called upon to deliver the souls required...

"THE DEVIL'S in THE RED"

WRITER
STEPHANIE PHILLIPS

ARTIST
TOMMASO BIANCHI

COLOR ARTIST
ROMULO FAJARDO JR.

LETTERER
VC's TRAVIS LANHAM

VARIANT COVER ARTISTS
ANDREA SORRENTINO; MIGUEL MERCADO;
JUSTIN MASON & EDGAR DELGADO ('Nuff Said);
MIRKA ANDOLFO (Sister Sorrow);
TODD NAUCK & RACHELLE ROSENBERG (Iconic)

COVER ARTIST
LEE BERMEJO

DESIGNER
CARLOS LAO

ADD'L LOGO DESIGN
GABRIEL MATA

EDITOR
MICHELLE MARCHESE

EDITOR IN CHIEF
C.B. CEBULSKI

RED SKULL CREATED BY JOE SIMON & JACK KIRBY

"THE SOUL DAGGERS"

WRITER
MARC GUGGENHEIM

ARTIST
MICHAEL STA. MARIA

COLOR ARTIST
DONO SÁNCHEZ-ALMARA

EDITOR
MIKEY J. BASSO

SENIOR EDITOR
MARK PANICCIA

FORGIVE ME.

CHK.

SCHLK

1945.

KUMMERSDORF-GUT.
BRANDENBURG, GERMANY.

NAZI WEAPONS TESTING AND RESEARCH FACILITY.

IT'S DONE.

REINHARD KRÄMER IS DEAD.

IS HE?

I KEPT MY END OF THE BARGAIN, MEPHISTO. NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO--

YOU AGREED TO CAPTURE THE SOUL OF REINHARD KRÄMER, RED SKULL...

...BUT I SENSE NO SOUL.

HIS BLOOD IS ON THE DAGGER...

...HIS BODY IS RIGHT THERE.

AND YET YOU HAVE NOT COLLECTED THE SOUL OF REINHARD KRÄMER.

HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE--?

BLAM

KRSSSH

...KRÄMER?

BLAM

I ALWAYS *KNEW* SOMEONE WOULD COME FOR ME...

...AND MY *RESEARCH.*

I JUST NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD BE AN OLD *ALLY* LIKE *YOU*, JOHANN--

?

ALLIANCES MEAN LITTLE...

...WHEN THE *DEVIL* COMES TO COLLECT.

HRGN!

WHUMP

I'VE NOW KILLED *TWO* KRÄMERS.

AND YET...

...I ASSUME I STILL HAVE *NOT* COLLECTED THE SOUL YOU SEEK.

YOU ASSUME *CORRECTLY.*

REINHARD WAS ALWAYS ONE OF THE REICH'S FINEST MINDS. *A VISIONARY.*

DEDICATING HIS INGENUITY TO *PRESERVING* AND *PERFECTING* THE ARYAN RACE.

BUT HE CLEARLY MISTOOK *OBSESSION* FOR *PURPOSE...*

...AND LET *VANITY* LEAD HIM ASTRAY.

THEN FIND THE *REAL* REINHARD... IF YOU STILL WANT YOUR *OWN* TOKEN OF NARCISSISM, RED SKULL.

I MIGHT HAVE CHOSEN THE WORD *LEGACY.*

LEGACY, OBSESSION, VANITY...*SEMANTICS.* HOLD A *MIRROR* TO ANY OF THEM AND YOU'LL SEE THE SAME *UGLY* FACE.

YOU TRAFFIC IN *SOULS,* NOT PHILOSOPHY. LET'S NOT PRETEND YOU CARE WHY MEN FALL--ONLY THAT THEY *DO.*

THE DEAL WAS MADE. THE TERMS WERE CLEAR.

I'LL FIND THE *TRUE* REINHARD AND BRING YOU HIS SOUL.

AND, IN TIME, I'LL BRING YOU THE SOUL OF *STEVE ROGERS.*

I'LL CREATE A HELL FOR CAPTAIN AMERICA THAT WOULD MAKE EVEN *YOU* BLUSH.

WHAT KRÄMER WAS DOING HERE... SIMPLY *CLONING* HIMSELF WOULD BE BENEATH HIS *TALENTS.*

NO...HE BELIEVED IN *REFINEMENT...* IN *EVOLUTION.* HE DIDN'T WANT TO JUST PRESERVE HIMSELF...

...HE WANTED TO *IMPROVE* HIMSELF.

HE ONCE SPOKE OF THE *PERFECTED* ARYAN FORM-- RESILIENT, BRILLIANT, UNBREAKABLE.

NOT *FOR* THE REICH...BUT *OF* IT. *PROOF* THAT THEIR VISION COULD ENDURE.

THE ALLIES ARE SQUEEZING THE *HEARTLAND* LIKE A CONSTRICTOR WITH ITS *PREY.*

THE AMERICANS ARE BREAKING THROUGH ON THE WEST...DRESDEN IS BURNING...

BUT *REINHARD...?*

NARCISSIST, VISIONARY...*WHATEVER* YOU WANT TO CALL HIM... REINHARD IS *NOTHING* IF NOT A *BELIEVER.*

HE MUST BELIEVE THAT IF HE CAN BECOME *PROOF* OF ITS EXCELLENCE...

...THE REICH WOULD FOREVER LIVE ON *IN HIS IMAGE.*

KRÄMER?

I JUST WANT TO TALK--

KRSSSSH

KRÄMER...

GRCK!

BLAM

KRCK

ARGH!

BLAM

BLAM

SHLK

WHUMP

SEND AS MANY CLONES AS YOU'D LIKE...

...I'LL KILL THEM *ALL* UNTIL I FIND THE REAL YOU.

YOU'RE RIGHT...I CAN'T BEST YOU IN *BATTLE*, RED SKULL...

...BUT YOU *KNOW* I'M SMARTER.

DO YOU THINK THAT I WOULDN'T BUILD *ALL OF THIS* WITHOUT A *BACKUP PLAN?*

YOUR BACKUP PLAN IS *SELF-DESTRUCTION?*

I THOUGHT IT WOULD HELP TO ENSURE MY WORK NEVER FELL INTO THE HANDS OF THE ALLIED FORCES.

BUT *YOU* NEED TO KILL ME.

IF I TAKE *MY OWN* LIFE... BY *MY OWN* HANDS...

...YOU WON'T GET WHAT YOU'RE AFTER, *WILL YOU?*

KRÄMER, I--

BACK UP OR I PRESS IT.

AND DROP YOUR WEAPONS... BOTH OF THEM.

I'VE WORKED OUT ENOUGH TO KNOW YOU HAVE NO REASON OF ***YOUR OWN*** TO WANT ME DEAD, SHMIDT.

OUR HISTORY... IT'S RICH, FOR CERTAIN. BUT NEVER FILLED WITH ***MALICE.***

YOU DON'T TAKE ***ORDERS...*** WHICH MEANS YOU'VE MADE SOME KIND OF DEAL--***A BARGAIN***--WITH ***MY LIFE*** AT THE CENTER.

SO HOW ABOUT A ***COUNTER-OFFER?***

SPARE ME, AND TOGETHER, WE CAN USE MY RESEARCH TO CREATE A ***PERFECT*** CLONE OF ***THE FÜHRER.***

NO NEED TO *CLONE* ABJECT *FAILURE.*

ADOLF HITLER... FAILURE? HE *CREATED* THE RED SKULL...

THE THIRD REICH IS FALLING TO THE ALLIES. IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THEY REACH BERLIN.

AMERICAN AND BRITISH FLAGS WILL SOAR OVER WHAT *SHOULD* HAVE BEEN A MONUMENT TO NAZI IDEALISM.

INSTEAD...IT'S AN *EMBARRASSMENT.*

BUT I *HAVE* MADE A DEAL...YOU'RE CORRECT.

A DEAL THAT WILL DO *MORE* FOR THE NAZI CAUSE THAN THIS WAR COULD *EVER* ACCOMPLISH.

...DON'T...

I *KNOW* YOU, REINHARD.

YOU WOULD DO *ANYTHING* TO PRESERVE WHAT THE FÜHRER HAS BUILT...

...PRESERVE IT AND PERFECT IT.

Y-YOUR DEAL...?

IT WOULD...DO THAT?

YES.

YOUR LIFE WILL SAVE NAZI GERMANY.

THE REMOTE.

MY RESEARCH... THE ATLANTEAN TECHNOLOGY PASSED DOWN IN MY FAMILY FOR GENERATIONS TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE... IT--IT CAN'T BE REPLICATED.

IT MUST BE PROTECTED.

I WILL TAKE CARE OF IT, REINHARD.

HEIL HIT--

DEET
THOOOM

"YOU PROMISED TO *PROTECT* HIS RESEARCH..."

...YOU LIED.

DID I?

AND THEY SAY THE *DEVIL* DEALS IN *DECEPTION.*

YOU GOT WHAT YOU WANTED.

PREACH TO SOMEONE ELSE, MEPHISTO.

INDEED. A SOUL FOR A SOUL.

THE SOUL OF *STEVE ROGERS* IN EXCHANGE FOR THE SOUL OF A *LORD OF DARKNESS...*

...BUT THE DEVIL IS IN THE *DETAILS,* ISN'T IT?

FIRST, STEVE ROGERS MUST SIGN HIS SOUL TO *ME.*

NOW.

WHAT'S THE FILE NUMBER AGAIN?

R-83.

SOME OLD WORLD WAR II *RELIC* OR SOMETHING.

GUY BOUGHT IT AT AUCTION THIS MORNING... NEED TO SHIP IT OUT *PRONTO.*

CAN'T *IMAGINE* HAVING THE KINDA MONEY YOU COULD JUST THROW AT OLD STUFF LIKE THIS, YOU KNOW?

GRAB THE OTHER END...

WHERE'RE WE SHIPPIN' IT?

NEW YORK CITY. SOME FELLA NAMED *SHMIDT.*

SHOULDA KNOWN...WALL STREET FAT CATS...

KRÄMER TECHNOLOGIES

END.

THERE IS A *STORY*. ONE THAT BEGINS AS ALL STORIES DO...

ONCE UPON A TIME...

...THERE WAS AN ORDER OF MAGIC WIELDERS, ***LORDS OF DARKNESS*** WHO SOUGHT CONTROL OF THE WORLD THROUGH ELDRITCH MEANS.

THEY PERFORMED A ***RITUAL*** USING FIVE ***ENCHANTED DAGGERS.***

AND THEN THEY WERE ALL ***BETRAYED.***

AND ***SLAIN.***

THE DAGGERS WERE ALL *LOST* TO *TIME.*

THEY BECAME *SCATTERED* ACROSS THE GLOBE.

SOME WERE *VALUED.*

OTHERS, *COVETED.*

BUT WHEREVER THEY WERE, WHOEVER THEY RESIDED WITH...

...MY *MASTER* BADE ME TO *FIND* THEM *ALL.*

THE ENDEAVOR TOOK *CENTURIES.*

AND *HARDSHIP.*

I LURKED IN *SHADOWS,* LEARNING WHAT I COULD.

I STRUCK IN *DARKNESS,* TAKING THAT WHICH WASN'T MINE.

THE ENTIRE TIME--ACROSS A SPAN OF CENTURIES--I HAD NO IDEA THAT MY WORK WOULD BE USED TO BIND THE WORLD TO MY MASTER'S WILL.

EXCELLENT. YOU HAVE DONE WELL, *SISTER SORROW.*

MIGHT I ASK...WHAT WAS THE *POINT* OF GATHERING THESE?

YOU DON'T STRIKE ME AS A MAN WITH A FONDNESS FOR TRINKETS, MEPHISTO.

BUT I AM NOT A MAN.

AND THESE ARE NO MERE "TRINKETS."

GUO, THE MASTER FROM K'UN-LUN, HAD ONE MORE SECRET TO REVEAL...

"...AFTER SOME ENCOURAGEMENT, OF COURSE."

TO WIT: THESE DAGGERS ARE USELESS--MERE "TRINKETS," AS YOU WOULD SAY--WITHOUT THE SOULS OF THE LORDS OF DARKNESS WHO FORGED THEM.

BUT YOU TOLD ME THAT ALL THE DARK LORDS WERE KILLED.

THEY WERE. BY ME.

"BUT IN MY...ENTHUSIASM, I MADE THE MISTAKE OF DESTROYING THEIR VERY SOULS.

"HOWEVER GUO HAS SINCE REVEALED TO ME THAT THE SOULS OF THEIR DESCENDANTS WOULD SUFFICE TO EMPOWER THE BLADES ONCE MORE."

AND SO I HAVE A NEW *TASK* FOR YOU.

COLLECT THE *SOULS* OF THOSE DESCENDED FROM THE LORDS OF DARKNESS.

AND *THEN?*

THEN I WILL HAVE ALL I NEED TO BRING MY DOMINION OVER HELL... TO *EARTH.*

THE SOUL DAGGERS

MARC GUGGENHEIM writer

MICHAEL STA. MARIA artist

DONO SÁNCHEZ-ALMARA color artist

VC's TRAVIS LANHAM letterer

MIKEY J. BASSO editor

MARK PANICCIA senior editor

TO BE CONTINUED...IN BRING ON THE BAD GUYS: DORMAMMU!

NEXT:

DORMAMMU #1

DOOM #1

GREEN GOBLIN #1

ABOMINATION #1

LOKI #1

RED SKULL #1

MEPHISTO #1

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